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California Resources Secretary Supports Sierra Nevada Conservancy Bill AB 2600

Bill creates the largest state conservancy in California, totaling 25 million acres from the Oregon Border to Kern County; the proposed legislation emphasizes collaboration, coordination and consultation with local governments, including public water systems

California Resources Secretary Mike Chrisman today hailed the passage of AB 2600, a bill establishing a Sierra Nevada Conservancy under the State Resources Agency that would make grants for a wide array of resource, recreation and economic preservation efforts throughout the greater Sierra Nevada region.

"The resources and economic values of the Sierra Nevada are important to every Californian—the significance of these values resonates far beyond the state's boundaries," said Secretary Chrisman. "The success of this legislation to establish the Sierra Nevada Conservancy would not be possible without the leadership of Assemblymembers Tim Leslie and John Laird, who answered Governor Schwarzenegger's call for a Sierra Nevada Conservancy to be created."

AB 2600 creates the Sierra Nevada Conservancy within the Resources Agency and would undertake projects and make grants and loans to other public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and tribal organizations in the Sierra Nevada Region. These grants and loans would fund various projects, including efforts to increasing tourism and recreation; cultural, archaeological, and historical resource protection; reducing risks from natural disasters; water quality protection; and local economic assistance.

"I am proud that this was an incredible bipartisan effort to steer new resources to California's top natural resource region while also giving Sierrans an important seat at the table in deciding state investments in our home region," said Assemblyman Tim Leslie.

"This is a great day for the Sierra," said Assemblymember John Laird. "The Conservancy will be a forum for people to work together to protect this jewel for future generations."

The program objectives place an emphasis on seeking a balance between environmental and economic goals providing increased opportunities for tourism, preserving working landscapes, assisting the regional economy, and supporting efforts to advance both environmental preservation, economic well being and explicitly recognize the need to deal with natural disasters such as wildfire.

“The Sierra Nevada Mountain Range stands as one of California’s greatest treasures. It is a destination for vacationers, provides a bounty of agricultural, ranching, mining, forestry products, and provides 65% of California’s water supply,” said Jim Sayer, President of the Sierra Business Council.

“This is an exciting day. After five years of hard work sierrians have found a new voice in decisions affecting the Sierras working with our new partners through a state conservancy,” said Izzy Martin of the Sierra Fund.

The size and scale of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy's jurisdiction is much larger (estimated at 25 million acres) and more diverse than the jurisdiction of other conservancies.

- Contains some of the most biologically diverse areas with more than 3,500 plant species and 720 species of animals in the country, which supports fully half the plants found in California, as well as 66% of the bird and mammal species and 50% of the reptile and amphibian species in California.
- Produces some of the most significant supplies of resources for human use in the state by providing 60% of California's water supply for residential, agricultural and environmental uses in the State.
- Produces 33% to 50% of the State's annual timber supply and supports a growing tourism industry involving more than 50 million recreation visits.
- Supports more than 212 communities, which are dependent upon natural resources for jobs, recreation and community character.

The proposed legislation gives greater recognition to the role of local government on its board and its operations than other conservancies and calls for a strategic program planning process involving public outreach, a process that is to be repeated at least once every five years. The program also recognizes the importance of Native American tribes within the region, by authorizing the Conservancy to provide grants and loans to tribal organizations. AB 2600 explicitly authorizes research and monitoring activities to support the development and the implementation of programs while encouraging the allocation of funding to be invested throughout the regions.

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy would promote the conservation of the state's land resources within the Counties of Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Fresno, Inyo, Kern, Lassen, Madera, Mariposa, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Tehama, Tulare, Tuolumne, and Yuba.

Since 1973, the Legislature has created eight conservancies in specified areas of the state having similar or related resource conservation objectives. The state Legislature created the seven state conservancies to acquire and protect undeveloped lands in specific regions of the state. Appointed boards of voting and non-voting members govern the Conservancies and are a state agency subject to the rules of the State of California.

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